

S/CRS BEST PRACTICES AND LEARNING: OPERATIONAL APPROACH AND TOOLS

Goal: To institutionalize the collection of best practices and lessons from US and international experience, and ensure that lessons are applied by adapting US policy in training, planning, exercises, operational approaches to conflict management, and coordination with domestic and international partners.

A key to improved results in managing conflict is the USG's ability to learn from past experience—applying best practices and lessons to future interventions. This document is designed to operationalize this goal by describing concretely S/CRS' operational approach and range of tools available (as staffing and resources allow) for best practices and lessons learned/applied efforts and how they fit into broader S/CRS initiatives.

S/CRS will also prioritize reaching out to the many other agencies, international and multilateral partners, and non-government organizations that focus on best practices and lessons initiatives, and to harness and disseminate their learning products for a USG interagency audience. Doing so will both leverage the work of other organizations and prevent duplication of effort.

Organization: Within S/CRS, each section has a role to play in harnessing and applying best practices and lessons learned. For instance, the Best Practices and Sectoral Coordination office (BPSC) gathers and disseminates best practices in specific functional areas. The Early Warning and Prevention office (EWP) has primary responsibility for organizing roundtables, games, and exercises and the integration of lessons into planning for prevention. The Response Strategy and Resource Management office (RSRM) integrates best practices and lessons into USG conflict management and response policy, budget requests, training, and operational concepts. The Planning office (PLN) integrates lessons into planning and coordinates of an Interagency/International Learning Agenda. The office coordinate regularly.

Although the website is still under construction, it can be accessed at www.crs.state.gov.

Best Practices, Lessons Learned and Lessons Applied Tools

Country Engagements: One of the best ways to bring lessons learned into practice is through planners who have absorbed past lessons. Early on or as appropriate in a country planning engagement, lessons from that country or other country cases can be used to help planners (and implementers) learn from past experiences, and inform thinking on scope/goals of mission, authorities, resource needs, and integrated approaches to persistent cross-sectoral issues such as spoilers and organized crime.

Tools for Country Engagements:

- 1) Country-specific lessons learned roundtable (Product: Short summary of event, lessons, and recommendations, available on website)
- 2) Country-specific exercises/games to test and generate lessons (Product: Short summary of event, lessons, and recommendations, available on website)
- 3) Forthcoming: Country-specific lessons learned literature review (Product: country-specific lessons annotated reading list, key links, and possible synthesis brief)
- 4) Forthcoming: Country-specific lessons learned CDs (Product: Portable country-specific resource for new member of interagency planning team or deploying personnel.)

Sectoral Best Practices: To fill a perceived gap in priority topic related to conflict management, stabilization, and reconstruction, the tools below are available to fill these knowledge gaps. When substantial best practices already exist on a topic, a Best Practices Guide may be developed for an interagency audience. S/CRS will also work with partners to link best practices to each task in the Essential Task Matrix, which will be available to USG planners or deployed responders online.

Tools for Sectoral Best Practices:

- 1) Essential Task Matrix (Product: This interagency-developed planning reference document will be periodically updated.)
- 2) Best Practices Guides (Product: Series of short “how-to” handbooks on S&R topics for interagency planner or first responder. Printed and on website.)
- 3) Roundtables/Exercises/Games on Priority Topics (Product: Short summary of event, lessons, and recommendations, available on website.)
- 4) Formal Interagency Evaluations/Studies (Product: Formal report, available on website.)
- 5) Forthcoming: Literature Reviews and Synthesis Brief on Priority Topics (Product: 1-2 page sectoral synthesis brief with annotated reading list and key links, available on website.)
- 6) Forthcoming: Linking Best Practices Resources to Essential Tasks Matrix (Product: Practical best practices and key resources linked to each S&R essential task as catalogued by the interagency document; on S/CRS website and CD Rom.)

Interagency Lessons Learned Agenda: S/CRS is developing an interagency agenda of all current and upcoming learning studies (including evaluations, assessments, guides, and studies) being developed throughout the US government, enabling greater knowledge sharing. (Product: Compiled list of ongoing and upcoming learning studies—interagency and international, available on website.)

Dissemination and Lessons Applied Efforts: To improve performance, best practices and lessons from experience must be not only gathered but applied. S/CRS will use these additional tools to ensure lessons learned are also applied.

Tools for Lessons Applied Efforts:

- 1) Training of planners and deployable personnel (Product: Trainings that incorporate lessons learned and best practices.)
- 2) Forthcoming: Website (Product: Best Practices Website disseminating S/CRS and other partners' lessons tools and products to a broader interagency and international audience.)
- 3) Forthcoming: Best Practices Guide Series: (Product: Series of topical best practices guides—described above—available as a series, electronically and in print.)
- 4) Forthcoming: Lessons Learned Brief Series (Product: all lessons-oriented S/CRS summaries, coming out of events and literature reviews, published as a Lessons Learned Brief series on the website.)
- 5) Outreach Outreach to interagency, international, and non-governmental partners to gather best practices and disseminate S/CRS best practices products and tools.)
- 6) Eventually: Community of Practice?

Process Learning: In addition to country- and sector-specific lessons, the USG must gather and apply lessons from interagency processes themselves in order to improve performance.

Tools for Process Learning:

- 1) Real-Time Reviews (RTR) and After Action Reviews (AAR) for Country Planning Engagements (Product: Short summary lessons and best practices gleaned from AAR/RTR.)
- 2) RTR and AAR for Joint Exercises with military, interagency, or international partners (Product: Short summary lessons and best practices gleaned from AAR/RTR.)
- 3) Eventually: Interagency RTRs and AARs for Actual Deployments
- 4) New: Handover Template (Product: Simple template available to all in S/CRS, required from departing staff to convey necessary background and lessons to successors.)

Other Demand-Driven Initiatives: When staffing allows, S/CRS may provide assistance to interagency partners who specifically request support in gathering or applying lessons learned and best practices related to conflict prevention or transformation.